

Enrollment Preferences Task Force
Minutes: Meeting #1
Thursday, September 26, 2013
6:30 pm
Buena Vista Conference Center

Task Force members present:

- Representative Kim Williams, Delaware House of Representatives
- Senator David Sokola, Delaware State Senate
- Secretary Mark Murphy, Delaware Department of Education
- Randall Hughes, Delaware State Board of Education
- Frederika Jenner, Delaware State Education Association
- Susan Francis, Delaware School Boards Association
- Yvonne Johnson, Delaware Parent Teacher Association
- Chuck Taylor, Charter School Network
- Gary Stockbridge, Delaware Business Roundtable
- Terri Hancharick, Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
- Lindsay O'Mara, Governor's Office
- Dr. Mervin Daugherty, Superintendent from New Castle County
- Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald, Superintendent from Kent County
- Dr. Allen Lathbury, Superintendent from Sussex Tech
- Mark Pruitt, Magnet School Representative
- Diane Ruth, Charter School Representative
- Dr. Terri Hodges, Parent Representative
- Elizabeth Lockman, Parent Representative

Staff present:

- Mark Brainard Jr., Delaware House of Representatives

Members Absent:

- Senator Nicole Poore, Delaware State Senate
- Representative Darryl Scott, Delaware House of Representatives (Damian DeStefano attended)
- Dr. Shawn Joseph, Superintendent from Sussex County
- Dr. Matthew Donovan, Delaware Association of School Administrators
- Dr. Victoria Gehrt, Superintendent from NCC Vo-Tech (Kathy Demarest attended)
- Dr. Deborah Zych, Superintendent from Polytech
- Julie Rumschlag, Magnet School Representative
- Donald Mell, Charter School Representative (Kendall Massett attended)

Public attendees:

- Michael Oboryshko, Community Member
- Mandy Gonye, Delaware PTA
- Nancy Willing, Community Member
- Brian Rutter, DSC
- Matt Albright, The News Journal
- Donna Johnson, State Board of Education
- Rep. John Kowalko, Delaware House of Representatives
- Mike Matthews, President of RCEA
- Mary Kate McLaughlin, Delaware Department of Education

- Joanne Christian, Community Member
 - Kathleen MacRue, Community Member
 - Eve Buckley, Community Member
 - Catherien Nessa, Community Member
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Meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m.

1. Introductions

Rep. Kim Williams, co-chair, introduced herself and spoke about the effect House Bill 90 will have on Delaware's school choice system and the intent of the task force created by the legislation. She then asked each person in attendance to introduce themselves.

2. Presentation

Rep. Kim Williams gave a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation touched on many aspects of magnet, vo-tech, and charter schools, both in Delaware and nationwide. First, it looked at the legislative intent of House Bill 90, the purpose of this task force. The task force was created to consider the current landscape of enrollment preferences and practices used by magnet, vocational technical, and charter schools and develop recommendations, if necessary. Next, the presentation provided national figures of student enrollment in charter schools as well as the number of Delaware students enrolled in magnet, vo-tech, or charter schools. Rep. Williams reported on a few of the changes accomplished by House Bill 90: school choice had not been updated since 1998, parents will be able to navigate the choice process easier, standardizing application forms, the same deadlines for all public schools, parents can submit their choice applications on DOE's website, districts must hold public information sessions about choice opportunities, districts are required to use the same standards for choice students as they do for their attendance zone students, districts must report capacity, and the creation of the task force are some of the changes because of HB 90.

The PowerPoint touched on the current Delaware Code pertaining to magnet, vocational technical, and charter schools. Rep. Williams asked Lindsay O'Mara to briefly speak about the Federal and Delaware laws and to answer any of the members' questions. Yvonne Johnson asked if the order of the preferences mattered as they are listed in the Delaware Code. O'Mara confirmed the order of the preferences do not matter when given a student preference. Senator Sokola inquired about the Charter School Program Fund using a potential boundary such as county lines to restrict preference. Representative Williams wanted to clarify that there was no specific list of preferences that schools must use. O'Mara states these schools could not have preferences; strictly a lottery system with no weighted preferences.

Accompanying the PowerPoint were two documents: A spreadsheet containing the enrollment practices and preferences for all magnet, vo-tech, and charter schools in the state of Delaware as well as enrollment preferences for charters in all 50 states. Note: not all states have existing charter laws.

****Note: Due to technical difficulties, digital copies of these documents can now be found on <http://legis.delaware.gov/LIS/TaskForces.nsf/113411bdd5de74d385257b3b005e343c/49b267f532b422d185257b6c0061a658?OpenDocument>***

3. Open discussion

Dr. Mervin Daugherty of Red Clay discussed the successes of Red Clay's magnet and charter schools, specifically mentioning the Delaware Military Academy, Wilmington Charter School, and Cab Calloway.

When asked about the concerns surrounding the admissions process for Cab Calloway Middle School, particularly prospective students of low socio-economic backgrounds who may not be able to afford private lessons like their peers, Dr. Daugherty discussed the school's increased outreach to the surrounding communities.

Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald stated that the impact of charter schools have not been felt in Kent County, and hoped the task force would address the concern of this inequality.

Sue Francis asked for an email address that she could send questions she will be receiving from the membership of the Delaware School Board Association. Rep. Williams replied that Ms. Francis could send all questions and comments to her email address (Kimberly.Williams@state.de.us). Ms. Francis also posed the question of what is the impact of the choice process on traditional enrollment public schools.

Parent Representative Elizabeth Lockman stated she would like to see real data on the number of children applying to these magnet, vo-tech, and charter schools versus the number of children actually being admitted.

Parent Representative Dr. Terri Hodges advocated for equal access for all students regardless of distance. She would also like to see a common application or common indicators that can be used when admitting students to these types of schools statewide.

Yvonne Johnson said she would like to see every child to be able to take advantage of every possible choice and opportunity.

Senator Sokola discussed the evolution of charter schools in Delaware and called it a continuous work in progress. He also suggested using the Education Commission of Delaware to research national data on magnet and vo-tech schools.

Secretary Mark Murphy said he was looking forward to having honest discussions on the underlying issues not usually talked about in policy settings.

Lindsay O'Mara echoed the sentiment and hopes the task force will be able to create a more robust choice system.

Damian DeStefano, representative for Rep. Darryl Scott, asked if most schools were able to identify at-risk students and inform them of these different choices. Kendall Massett, representative for Donald Mell, gave the example of Spanish teachers aiding Spanish-speaking parents in the application process.

Mark Pruitt asked that the task force consider the differences between enrollment practices (ex. Rubric, preference, standards, and lottery).

Fredericka Jenner hoped that task force would look at the diversity of Delaware's students and remember that some students and families choose neighborhood schools and not magnet, vo-tech, or charter.

Terri Hancharick described her primary role as ensuring students with disabilities receive equal opportunities. Chuck Taylor echoed the sentiment of making the choice system fair for every Delaware student.

Kendall Massett, representative for Donald Mell, advocated excellent education no matter the type of school a student attends.

Diane Ruth hopes the task force can look at what schools can do to provide support for the family's involvement in the child's education.

Randall Hughes hopes the task force can dispel many of the misconceptions that surround the application and enrollment process. He noted that Sussex County was underrepresented at the meeting and that moving forward the task force should draw participation from Sussex so their issues are brought to the table.

AJ Lathbury discussed the need to replicate the choices in New Castle County throughout the rest of the state. Sussex County suffers from not having these same choices.

4. Next Steps

Rep. Williams provided a recap on what the task force would like to discuss over the course of the remaining four meetings. These issues include the application processes and enrollment preferences, compliance to federal and state law, information on magnet and vo-tech schools nationwide, more choices throughout Delaware's three counties, schools offering support to families, equal access to all students, information to students regarding all choices, impact on schools and districts where choice students would have been attending, school diversity, and students with disabilities.

5. Public Comment

Nancy Willing inquired about where to find minutes and copies of the information provided to members of the task force. Rep. Williams explained that minutes and more information would be found on the state's public calendar (<http://egov.delaware.gov/pmc/>).

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Rep. Kowalko spoke on the exclusion of some students to particular choice schools. He said these exclusions occur and should be rectified immediately. He also stated these choice schools have dismissed students from their enrollment, which is an option traditional schools do not have.

Mike Matthews stated he serves on the district/charter collaboration task force created by Senate Bill 174, and hopes the Enrollment Preferences Task Force has a better opportunity to address why teacher standards are the same across all school settings. Those teachers in the lowest performing schools are held to the same standards as those teaching in the highest performing schools.

Joanne Christian hoped the task force would recommend changing some of more unequal criteria requirements.

Eve Buckley believed that minority and low-income students do not have the same access as other students in the Delaware school system and hoped that would be a topic of discussion for the task force moving forward.

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 pm.

Next meeting: October 24, 2013 at the Buena Vista Conference Center from 6:30pm-8:30pm.